

MV8

A Billboard Spotlight

VIDEO VENUES SURROUND AUDIENCES WITH WALL-TO-WALL SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

By MOIRA McCORMICK

Two or three years ago, in music video's ancient past, just about the only place to go to see the latest clips was a nightclub. In these modern times, of course, one never need leave one's living room a flick of the tv dial most any time of day will do the trick.

With the proliferation of music video programs on network, cable, and local television, venue operators for whom video has been a primary drawing card now must rely on more than just the latest clips to keep their coffers filled. "When customers are paying \$8-\$10 to get in a club, they want more for their money," observes Joe Ver-ange of Boston video nightspot Metro. "They could al-ways just stay in their living rooms, open a beer, and watch 'Friday Night Videos' for free."

Venue operators and video programmers are tuning more and more to in-house video production (including ambient or "wallpaper" video), technical advances both visual and aural, and out-of-the-mainstream clips to maintain audience interest. "The appeal of music videos per se is not what it was when they were launched," opines programmer Steve Jarvis of the Chicago area Snuggery clubs.

"You can't play only music video any more," agrees Chris Russo, president of New York-based national video pool Telegenics.

"You'd bore people to death. You have to keep things alive with ambient video."

The two-year old Telegenics, which services 100 clients coast to coast, is exclusive distributor for ambient service Zoom Video. In addition, the pool offers around 20 hours of ambient footage produced in-house. "Ambient has come a long way, out of necessity," says Russo. "A lot of records don't have accompanying videos; a club with an expensive system might as well use it to create ambience in the room while those records are on the turntable."

Programmer Shelley Howard of Chicago's Cabaret Metro, regarded as a pioneer in ambient video, was synching public-domain footage and assorted graphics to dance tracks four years ago. Now, his "Shelleyvision"

inch editing system," says Howard, "and while a song is playing, the images are quick-cut to synch with the beats." Six programs are run simultaneously, keyed by a Panasonic industrial switcher and projected on Cabaret Metro's three connected large screens. "We're drawing 1,000 a night at 'Video Metro,'" Howard stresses, "and we don't get that many for a live band."

Many venues are experiencing the benefits of creating their own ambient footage. Full-time cameramen are becoming more common, clips produced in-house are gaining in popularity, and even a club's dancing patrons can provide onscreen visual focus. "We use hired performers and people in the club for 'live ambient' visuals," notes Steve Jarvis, referring to the Snuggery flagship Schaumburg outlet. "People love to look at themselves integrated onscreen with the music video."

Production manager and veejay Steve Robinson of Los Angeles' pre-eminent video club Revolver places a premium on in-house production. "I have nine production people on my staff alone, including cameraman, senior editor, and veejays," he relates. "We're known for out edits; you'll never see the same thing twice here."

Revolver relies to a large extent on comedy videos to flesh out its music video repertoire (something of a necessity, Robinson observes, with video running there 14 hours a day, seven days a week), as does the 16-unit Confetti nightclub chain. Echoing many a venue operator in these times, director of entertainment David Greenberg says, "We don't just play video for videos' sake. We run our own comedy tapes, produced out of studio in Confetti's corporate offices in Houston."

While ambient video and in-house productions continue to gain prominence, the traditional music video clip



Bob Dylan's "Jokerman."

has by no means disappeared. "We're in the business of promoting music video," states Revolver's Robinson.

"We're based here on the West Coast, along with the record companies and many of the artists, and we do a lot of promotions for the record companies." These promotions may involve an original video produced by the club itself, as was the case recently with a Heaven 17 cut, or they may center around a premier of a new record company clip. "We had Wham!'s imported videos before they even had a U.S. deal," notes Robinson.

Several thousand miles due east, New York's most noted video club Private Eyes finds itself in a similar situation. "We have a commitment to music video," pledges vice president Steve Sukman, "and we work very closely with the record companies." "Friday Night Videos" has shot



Clarence Clemons in "A Woman's Got The Power."

NEW OUTLETS BRING IN VIDEO TO CREATE LIVELY BACKDROP

Video, video everywhere, and not a chance to blink. Music video appears not only to have taken over the airwaves, it can be found anywhere from a department store to a restaurant to a roller rink to a supermarket to a gymnasium to a dentist's office.

"Ever since corporate America decided that music video is here and acceptable, it's been turning up in restaurants, bars, skating rinks, etc.," observes Ed Steinberg, president of pioneer national video pool Rockamerica. "Music video used to be regarded as weird, and now it's normalized."

Although 80% of Rockamerica's 450 national accounts are still in the nightclub category, Steinberg does see "a shift to more non-bar-type venues. The promotional value will be greatly increased as a result, and that's the bottom line—selling records." Steinberg says Rockamerica's accounts grew 20% this year over last year, and expects a 40% increase next year. What's more, he adds, "I get affidavits from accounts saying their businesses picked up 40% since adding video."

Some of Rockamerica's "non-bar-type" accounts include the California-based El Torito and Red Onion Mexican restaurant chains, A&S department stores in New York, Six Flags Over Mid-America theme park, and various roller rinks and bowling alleys.

Chris Russo, president of Telegenics video pool, finds that hotel chains around the country are installing video to glamorize their cocktail hours. "It's still a dance business," observes Russo, "but since dance music is becoming a crossover Top 40 sound, it's becoming easier to deal with the market at large."

Telegenics services Holiday Inn and Marriott franchises around the country, as well as the May Co. and H&M's department stores, and assorted video restaurants.

Television continues to be a primary outlet for music video (Capitol Records' video manager Mark Rodriguez notes that low-power stations and local channels adding music video programming around the country means

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Bonnie Tyler in "Looking For A Hero."

encompasses sophisticated computer graphics, old newscasts, commercials, and film trailers, thanks in large part to his association with major film companies such as Paramount, Warner Bros. Universal, Columbia, MGM, and Orion.

"The tapes are compiled onto master reels via a 3/4-

segments here, he says, and Private Eyes has also hosted video shoots for the Thompson Twins, Difford and Tilbrook, and MTV's "Basement Tapes."

Private Eyes is one of the most technically sophisticated



Director Gary Marshall and Robby of Menudo on set of "Like A Cannonball."

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NEW OUTLETS

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"there are new shows every week," but it appears that the movie theater isn't far behind. The 86-unit Essaness Theater chain in Chicago has been experimenting with a combination of music video and taped concerts in an effort to determine whether music video is "a viable added programming source for theater owners across the nation," according to Essaness president Alan Silverman.

Essaness' suburban Forest Park Theater has been used for the video "experiment," which involves a technique imparting "35mm quality to half-inch videotape," according to Silverman.

At New York-based Music Motions, music video actually shot

on 35mm film is marketed to movie theaters, to be used as short subjects. The not-quite-year-old company has released two of its "Music Zaps"—an original video featuring Carly Simon, and Jermaine Jackson's "Dynamite" clip (Arista)—and is working on a third, Malcolm McLaren's "Madame Butterfly" (Island).

"We like to treat video as an art form, not just promotion," remarks Chris Puskiewicz, national director of video promotions for Island Records. "Malcolm's clip is slow, dreamy, and clocks in at 6:20, which is too long for tv. Cinema distribution is a good plan for product of this nature."

According to Music Motion's vice president/special projects Pamela Henning, the 35mm video clip is adjusted for wide

screen projection, and the audio remixed onto a four-channel Dolby SurroundSound track. "On Jermaine's 'Dynamite,' the crickets are chirping right in your ear—and when the cell door slams, you're inside it," Henning elaborates.

Music Zaps are playing in 60 major markets at present, and president Tom Hayes expects 1,600 theaters to subscribe to the service "by Christmas at the very least." Current subscription rates are \$200 per month per theater. "Some of the clips may be seen on tv as well," notes Hayes, "but the impact of a 40-foot screen is an exclusive."

A Chicago area non-theatrical film distributor is also involved in music video, but on a different basis. Films Inc. of suburban Wilmette has been putting on "Video Dance Nights" at colleges for almost a year. Working in conjunction with Warner Bros. Records, with whom they have exclusive college video distribution rights, Films Inc. offers three hours of dance tapes presented by a live veejay. "We took the idea from old school hops," explains president Ed Wakeman, adding, "It's a complete entertainment package. Anybody can watch music video on tv—this is a specially-produced program."

For a fee of \$100-\$3,500, Films Inc. supplies tapes, hardware, and veejay, as well as advertising, marketing, promotion, and ticket printing. "The college market is one of the biggest untapped video markets in the country," states Jim Thompson, president of Chicago-based firm Video Pool.

Video Pool, whose 60 accounts are mainly concentrated in areas where the national pools do not reach, has its share of non-club video venues, including Southern California's J.W. Robinson department store (which uses video as part of the overall decor of its teen clothing departments) and Fastrax "video restaurant" in Minneapolis.

The video restaurant appears to be something of a mini-trend. Fastrax, which bills itself as "the Video-Tech Bar and Cafe," features 11 monitors and two large screens showing continual video clips 14 hours a day. "You're pretty well surrounded by video when you come in here," remarks owner Terry Selb.

Fastrax caters to a 20-25-year old crowd, says Selb, serving "American cuisine" and running heavy on the dance clips. "We also assemble our own ambient video in-house in a 3/4-inch editing machine," adds Selb.

Though Selb notes that Fastrax's video setup costs "thousands of dollars a month to run," he feels the results make it worthwhile. The eatery has found its core audience—although, he recalls, "there was some resistance to the idea at first. It's an Orwellian type of experience that Mr. and Mrs. John Doe might have found unfamiliar."

"The challenge is to continually change," Selb goes on. "Rock videos per se won't bring people in, to spend money on what they can get at home. The key is to be expansive, to have a live deejay who comes up with new programming ideas."

At Long Island, N.Y.'s Planet Earth Video Cafe, the key is unusual programming. "We show a lot of videos that don't make it to MTV, as well as self-produced ambient material," says manag-

er Bill Chu.

Planet Earth draws most of its 20-22-year old crowd from nearby Hofstra and Adelphi Universities, and utilizes progressive AOR station WLIR-FM to cross-promote itself. "We go after the people who aren't interested in Top 40 stations," says Chu.

Thirty-five monitors are set in rows along the restaurant's walls, with a table in front of each. By pressing a button, customers can choose between three pre-programmed channels: 1) Planet Earth's menu and wine list; 2) video music clips (in the Frankie Goes To Hollywood, Howard Jones, and Thompson Twins mold); and 3) "bits and pieces of old movies, wacky moments in sports, etc.," according to Chu.

Music video in every lane greets bowlers at Milwaukee's Red Carpet Regency Lanes, according to the bowling chain's entertainment director Bob Huntington. "We feature music video in three of our 10 bowling center lounges," says Huntington, "but at the Regency Lanes, there is an automated Brunswick scoring system with a 25-inch color monitor over each lane. During moonlight bowling periods, usually on weekends, we turn out the lights over the alley and play videos while people bowl... We get all ages, so we play all types of videos—country, black, and rock."

Huntington says that while response has been favorable, it's hard to gauge whether business has increased appreciably as a result of video. "It does seem to make people bowl faster," he muses. "The waiting lines move more quickly."

Similarly, public interest in video, and perhaps even customer

traffic itself, has increased at Long Island video roller rink Hotkates, according to general manager Arthur Freedland. "We've been open five years and had video for two," he says, "and I feel it's brought more people in the door."

Hotkates features five monitors throughout the facility, with a large screen visible from the skating area. Surprisingly, there aren't any collisions between video-gazing skaters, says Freedland. "The screen's so large, it takes no effort to see from the rink," he elaborates. "You will, however, see 150 or so people at peak times, standing in the center of the rink watching a video."

Hotkates possesses one of the most sophisticated, and largely unheralded, video systems on the East Coast, says Freedland, including effects generators, switchers, time base correctors, graphics generators, and live cameras, as well as an IBM PC computer for cross-indexing the video and record library. "Some clubs will spend a minimum of money on a system that'll soon be obsolete," Freedland says. "If you spend your money right the first time, you don't need to update. Our system right now is state of the art production quality."

Music video has even found its way into the supermarket checkout line, courtesy of COLTV (pronounced "coal tee vee," an acronym for "check out line television.") The Pittsburgh-based firm offers closed-circuit video programming to 22 area grocery stores, which keeps shoppers amused while waiting to pay for their goods.

MOIRA MCCORMICK



Producer Ken Walz and Patty Smyth on "The Warrior" set.

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